

TERRENCE B. SHERIDAN

Chief of Police

**"INTEGRITY...FAIRNESS...SERVICE"****BALTIMORE COUNTY POLICE**

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My name is Craig Bowers and I am a Lieutenant with the Baltimore County Police Department with 31 years of law enforcement experience. The last 10 years have been spent as the unit commander of the Homicide Division.

Within this period of time this agency has continually experienced an increase in the reluctance of those witnessing or having knowledge of criminal activity to share that information with law enforcement. This fear for their safety and the safety of their family and loved ones is genuine. We only need to look at cases around the state and the publicity surrounding those incidents to concur, witness intimidation is a factor affecting the judicial system.

The following are examples that have occurred within Baltimore County:

A murder occurred at a local nightclub, which was witnessed by three individuals who were visiting the county. When initially questioned by the police they were very willing to help and were able to supply descriptions of suspects responsible as well as vehicles used. Investigators were able to determine the murder was drug/gang related and using information supplied in part by the witnesses, made an arrest. The witness was shown a group of photographs and viewed a line-up where the individual arrested was identified. The motions hearing after being postponed on numerous occasions was scheduled. On this date, as the witness was leaving her home two individuals she described as "rough looking" approached her inquiring if she was going to court. As she attempted to walk around them to her vehicle, both opened their coats revealing handguns in their waistband.



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As expected, the witness became fearful but still appeared in court. At this point, the defense requested a postponement, which over the objections by the State was granted, creating an additional delay in the trial. Several months later when the trial began, the witness testified she could not identify the suspect and does not recall viewing the photographs or making the earlier identification. The jury verdict was Not Guilty.

A poll of the jury after the verdict showed a concern among the jury members of how it was possible that the witness could not remember what she had said to law enforcement and questioned the accuracy of the officer's testimony. The jurors were then informed of the witness intimidation and they were shocked.

A 16-year-old was found beaten to death and set on fire in a park in the Pikesville area. Arrested were four individuals who revealed, the motive for this attack was the victim was a witness in a sexual assault in which one of those arrested had been accused of the assault.

In closing, within the past 24 months, members of the Homicide Unit have investigated 5 solicitations to commit murder involving defendants who expressed interest in having the witnesses which would have testified against them killed.

Witness Intimidation continues to increase the threat to public safety and to the effective and fair prosecution of criminal cases. Those responsible for carrying out or orchestrating witness intimidation are faced with a maximum imprisonment not to exceed 5 years.



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Currently, law enforcement agencies can offer very little to ensure the safety of witnesses, short of relocation. These otherwise community involved, law abiding citizens, find themselves ultimately faced with the choice; separation from family and friends or not to cooperate during the prosecution of the offense with law enforcement officials.

